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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001206

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TAGS: PREL PGOV VE

SUBJECT: PPT AND CHAVEZ: A TENUOUS ALLIANCE

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. National Assembly Second Vice President and Patria Para Todos Secretary General Jose Albornoz told PolCouns August 19 that he expects President Chavez to initiate "an opening" with the USG after the U.S. presidential election and Venezuela's November state and local elections. Albornoz confirmed that his small pro-Chavez party continues to have serious differences with Chavez and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and plans to back its own candidates against PSUV candidates in many races. The PPT may even be considering breaking with Chavez entirely. The PPT Secretary General said the PSUV is fractured and faring poorly in polls; he predicted Chavez would postpone the November elections if that trend continues. Albornoz nevertheless faulted the opposition for failing to build political momentum after defeating Chavez's constitutional reform package in the December 2007 referendum. End Summary.

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Bilateral Relations  
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¶2. (C) National Assembly Second Vice President and Patria Para Todos (PPT) Secretary General Jose Albornoz told PolCouns August 19 that given the importance of the U.S.-Venezuelan economic relationship, he believes pressure is growing within the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) to have "some kind of opening" with the USG. Albornoz predicted that President Chavez would personally launch any new approach to the USG, but at the same time would wait until after both the U.S. presidential election and Venezuela's November state and local elections before doing so. In the meantime, Albornoz said he did not expect any BRV movement toward the United States.

¶3. (C) Noting that the BRV discourages him from meeting USG officials, Albornoz said he nevertheless insists upon his "autonomy." He noted that he took the precaution of sending his special police (DISIP) bodyguards away before his August 19 meeting with Poloffs at the PPT party headquarters. Albornoz also said PPT differs with the BRV on a number of foreign policy issues, particularly the BRV's position with respect to "some groups in Colombia." He reiterated his interest in maintaining a discreet dialogue with the U.S. Embassy.

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Differences With the PSUV  
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¶ 14. (C) Albornoz bemoaned ongoing differences within the Patriotic Alliance, the electoral alliance between Chavez's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and several smaller pro-government parties like his PPT. He noted that his small, but noteworthy party, remains very interested in winning state and local races in the several states where the party is strongest. He regretted Chavez's attacks on his party for supporting Lenny Manuitt, daughter of Guarico State Governor Eduardo Manuitt, instead of the PSUV candidate, former Information Minister William Lara, in the gubernatorial race there. (Note: A large Lenny Manuitt campaign banner hangs in front of PPT headquarters. End Note).

¶ 15. (C) Albornoz noted that so far the PSUV is only supporting PPT candidates on combined pro-government slates for legislative assemblies in six states. He noted that the PPT and the Communist Party (PCV) have therefore combined forces in several states, albeit undermining pro-government unity. Albornoz confirmed that PSUV Vice President Muller's hard negotiating style has made matters worse for the PSUV within the Patriotic Alliance. Albornoz foreshadowed a potential PPT break with the government. He said he was contemplating resigning from the Vice Presidency of the National Assembly to be able to devote more time to his party's campaign. He also said his daughter resigned her position as a diplomat in the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington at his request.

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Electoral Analysis  
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¶ 16. (C) Albornoz said the PSUV lacks the electoral machinery that Chavez's former party, the Fifth Republic Movement

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(MVR), had. He also said the PSUV is so badly fractured that Chavez may try to form another new party after the November elections. The government's internal polls show the PSUV in trouble in many states, including some traditional pro-government strongholds. If that trend continues, Albornoz believes the BRV will postpone November's gubernatorial and mayoral elections.

¶ 17. (C) The PPT Secretary General also criticized the opposition for failing "to cash the blank check" of its defeat of Chavez's constitutional reform package in December ¶ 2007. He said continuing divisions within the opposition seriously jeopardize opposition parties' chances of victory in state and cities they should otherwise win. Albornoz suggested that his small pro-Chavez party is a greater threat to the PSUV because it offers a fully articulated progressive alternative to Chavismo.

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Comment  
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¶ 18. (C) Given that his party is still cooperating with the Chavez government, Albornoz has considerable insight into Chavez's relative electoral strengths and weaknesses. Late last year, Albornoz foreshadowed for Poloffs the defeat of President Chavez's constitutional reform package at a time when the government still appeared to enjoy significant electoral advantages. He and his party endured Chavez's attacks for declining to join the PSUV and seemed to gain some ground in the wake of the defeat of the constitutional package. PSUV efforts to steamroll small pro-Chavez parties in the selection of gubernatorial and mayoral candidates for November appear so far to have only stiffened their resistance -- and may possibly force a real break -- with the small, but better organized, PPT.

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